



News Release

IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF WATER RESOURCES

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Moscow Ground Water Petitions Denied; Water Right Approved North of Town

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The Director of the Idaho Department of Water Resources has denied a series of petitions seeking special protections for the Grande Ronde and Wanapum aquifers, which supply much of the ground water in the Moscow-Pullman area.

IDWR Director Karl Dreher did however, order the creation of a citizen advisory group to work with the existing Palouse Basin Aquifer Committee in developing recommendations for revisions to the ground water management plan adopted by PBAC, water conservation, research and public participation.

Dreher will also review the aquifers annually and will consider designating a critical ground water area or ground water management area without further petition if conditions warrant.

Citing continued declines in ground water levels, five petitioners including the Moscow Civic Association, and the Idaho Conservation League, last year petitioned the director to take eight actions including a critical ground water designation for the Grande Ronde aquifer, and a ground water management area designation for the Wanapum aquifer. The two aquifers overlap each other with the Grande Ronde being the deeper of the two.

The petitioners also sought a moratorium on future ground water development in the area and requested that portions of an interagency agreement signed in 1992 between IDWR and the Washington Department of Ecology pertaining to a Moscow-Pullman area ground water management plan be rescinded.

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In denying the petitions, Dreher noted that recent data indicates that the rate of decline in the Grande Ronde aquifer is decreasing and the ground water levels in the Wanapum Aquifer have recovered from previous declines.

Noting that only 13% of the Grande Ronde aquifer is within Idaho, Dreher said that coordinated ground water management with the State of Washington is the preferred approach unless conditions demonstrate that independent management in Idaho will be more effective.

Also, IDWR has approved an application submitted by Ralph Naylor Farms, LLC to begin using ground water both for irrigation and industrial use on land about three miles north of Moscow.

Latah County, the Moscow Civic Association and a private citizen who were concerned the request could further deplete the Wanapum and Grand Ronde aquifers protested the application.

On September 29, 2004, IDWR conducted a hearing in Moscow and subsequently determined that the aquifer model prepared by the applicant and corroborated independently by two University of Idaho experts, shows little interconnection between the aquifer proposed to be tapped by Naylor Farms and the aquifers used by the cities of Moscow and Pullman due to geologic conditions that restrict flows.

The proposed Naylor Farms ground water source is below the Wanapum aquifer and the Department found that if the well casing is sealed properly, Naylor Farms will essentially be pumping from a separate source of water and will not reduce the quantity of water available to the cities or to rural water users.

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